



Already Dead (For the Most Part) by everybreatheverymove

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Summary: Prompt: When his pet fish is dying, Will and the rest of the party have to decide which one of them will commit the unholyest of acts: flushing it down the toilet. Evidently, the only one with the balls to put the poor thing out of its misery is El.

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"I'll do it." The shorter girl offers, eyes wide and kind. "It's just a fish."

"Your total lack of empathy towards dying animals amazes me." Dustin tells her, half-mumbled through the sleeve of his hoodie. His eyes follow her as she walks past him, glaring.

The party had been gathered in Will's living room that afternoon, midway through a movie marathon when the boy had noticed that something was wrong. He'd wiggled his out from between Mike and Lucas - passed the popcorn bowl down to Dustin, sprawled out half-asleep on the floor. El had given him a weird look from her spot on the rug, but Max hadn't batted an eye, moving to snag a handful of popcorn without so much as blinking.

"Guys?" He'd said, low and almost silent enough that no one caught it. But Mike had heard him and he'd stood up and followed the shorter boy over to the cabinet by the wall.

"What is it?"

"I think my fish just died."

"What?" Dustin suddenly squeaked, and he was up on his legs before anyone could stop him. "No!" It was no mystery that Dustin had a passion for animals, no matter how small or strange or interdimensional.

"He's just," Will started, tilting his head in the opposite direction that Mike had done his, the pair watching the sideways floating goldfish in its bowl, "lying there."

"Oh," Dustin sniffed, "he's not dead. He's *dying*."

"For real?" Will's eyes widened.

"Nancy had a goldfish once," Mike started, "I was only, like, four years old but I remember she made us have a funeral for it and everything. My dad wasn't happy."

"That the fish died?" Max voiced, peering over the group's shoulder. "What, was it expensive or something?"

"No," Mike's shoulders slouched as he shrugged, "I guess he was just annoyed that we buried it instead of flushing it down the toilet. Said it a waste of time."

"So I'm supposed to flush it?"

"I don't know." The tallest boy said, glancing down at Will, "Maybe we're supposed to just put it out of its misery." He suggested, earning an audible groan from Lucas.

"Like... whack it?"

"No, like *flush* it." Max clarified, earning a nod from Mike.

And so Dustin had gone and retrieved the smallest mug he could find from the kitchen, scooping up the dying pet in a single stroke with enough water to keep it hydrated. The party had made their way into the Byers' bathroom then, all gathered around the toilet as though they were going to perform a sacred ritual.

"Who's gonna do it?" Mike had asked, glancing around at his friends.

Lucas held up his hands, "Well, it is Will's, so..."

Will had let out a small gasp, staring down at his pet, "I can't do it."

"Sinclair's out. Max?"

"I mean," the girl had started, pausing as she leaned over to take a look at the fish. She'd looked back and forth between the the mug and the toilet for a solid ten seconds before finally answering with a, "No."

With a whine when the party turned to him, Dustin had expressed his refusal with a shake of his head and a "Nope, no way in hell."

And that's when El had volunteered.

"She's plenty empathetic." Mike defends the girl now, "You're just

annoyed you don't have the balls to flush a stupid fish." His brows lower, a deep frown settling in on his face. "No offence, Will."

"None taken."

"I don't see you stepping up to plate, Michael." The curly-haired hair boy retorts.

"I would have if nobody else did!"

"Oh, but you conveniently waited until your girlfriend said she'd do it to say so."

"Whatever." Mike pulls a face, "It's not like-"

Interrupting him, Max wrinkles her noses, "I thought Hopper said you should try and not kill anyone for a while."

"It's not a person." The brunette says back, slightly confused, "It's a *fish*."

"Yeah, but still," the other girl starts, chewing at the inside of her cheeks thoughtfully, "Maybe it has, like, a spirit or something."

"It's a fish." El repeats, monotone and casually calm, "It doesn't even have a brain."

"Wait- what?" Max's eyes widen.

"Actually, they *have* brains but it's highly likely that they don't feel pain the way we do."

"See?" Mike points towards the mug in Will's hand, "He'll be fine."

"Plus, I mean, he's already mostly dead." Dustin adds.

"Isn't it technically murder, though?" Lucas reasons.

"It's a dying fish, Lucas." Mike replies with half a snarl, head tilting to the side, "I don't think it's a crime to put it out of its misery."

"Still... murder." He repeats, remembering something the chief had told last year, "And Hopper said-"

"Yeah, yeah, I know, '*murder is frowned upon*'." El says with a roll of her eyes, parting her lips to nibble at the bottom one. She takes two steps closer toward the toilet seat then, eyeing the beige mug in Will's hand as she moves to pull the lid up.

"You're really gonna do it?" Lucas squirms, folding his arms over his chest as though it's the crime of the century. The sleeves of his baseball tee slide up to elbows and he looks up to the ceiling when El whips back around to face him.

The brunette only frowns, mild confusion written across her face as his obvious opposition. Before she can say anything more, Max leans her forearm on his lean shoulder, a grin on his face, "It's not like it can get much deader, Sinclair."

"Still," he starts with a shrug, shifting his gaze from the patchy coat of the paint on the ceiling to Will, still holding the mug of cold water, "you could just let him go naturally."

"I don't know," the smaller boy says, gaze never lifting from the bright floating blob in the water, "And, I mean, I can just get another one, I guess."

"Exactly." Mike agrees, hand coming down to clap his friend on the back, "We'll get you a new one." He nods, eyeing the rest of the party for their support.

"Are we flushing the thing or not?" Dustin throws a hand up in the air wildly, the other flying up to his head to hold his hat into place at the motion, "Pretty soon that thing's gonna be dead anyway."

Will extends his arm out then, corners of his mouth turning down as he passes the mug over to El.

She grips the mug in both hands, slowly prying it from his fingers, "You're sure?" She tilts her head down, eyes darkening as she asks for confirmation.

He nods, shifting from one foot onto the other, glancing up at her face to avoid looking down at the toilet. "Do it."

Taking a moment to consider her actions, El stares down at the half-

dead fish floating sideways in the clear water. She purses her lips, seems to jerk the cup around for a second as though to evaluate the fish's health.

Mike clears his throat then, hand lifting from off of his friend's back to slide into his own front pockets, and he bounces on the heels of his sneakers, "Any day how." He offers a small smile to his girlfriend just as she glares over at him, clearly delaying the inevitable.

His smile turns to a grin however, knowing and innocent, when she suddenly flicks her head to the side, the mug flying out of her grasp to hover over the toilet bowl.

It lowers ever so slightly, tipping until the water begins to trickle out into the toilet, dying fish plopping into the pool of water at the base of the bowl.

"Rest in peace, little fella." Dustin says just as the toilet flushes, bowing his head in respect solemnly. Until Max whacks his arm with an '*idiot*', that is.

"What was its name, anyway?" The redhead asks, turning to Will.

"Umm," he pauses, almost bashful, "Ferris."

"Ferris?" Lucas deadpans, "You called your pet fish *Ferris*?"

Mike snorts, accepting the mug that floats over into his hand as El comes to stand beside him, "I think it's cool." He shrugs, placing the pot down on the sink.

"Of course you do." Max accuses, "You'd call yours, like, Gizmo or something." Okay, so it wasn't the best thing she's ever come with, she'll admit.

"What?" He squeaks.

"I'd call mine Mikey." El cuts in, reaching down for the tall boy's hand, earning another grin.

"That's it." Dustin shakes his head, pulling his hat off as he makes for the door, "I'm out."

Max smirks, "You can't talk. You named one of your pets after a candy bar!"

"The *best* candy bar!"

"Whatever." He brushes her off, heading back into the living room to resume his spot on the floor

Mike and El soon follow them, but Lucas is still staring at the toilet, unmoving with a slight grin on his face.

"What?" Will asks, uncertain.

"Ferris? Really?"

"*Bueller!*" Dustin cries out from the living room, earning a laugh from El and '*God, you nerd!*' from Max.